

The Trickster and the Strongman

Exploring Peer Review to Regain a Consensus Reality and Understanding of Expertise

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*Odin and Loki, from 18th century
Icelandic manuscripts*



THE PEER REVIEW
PROBLEM WE ALL
HAVE

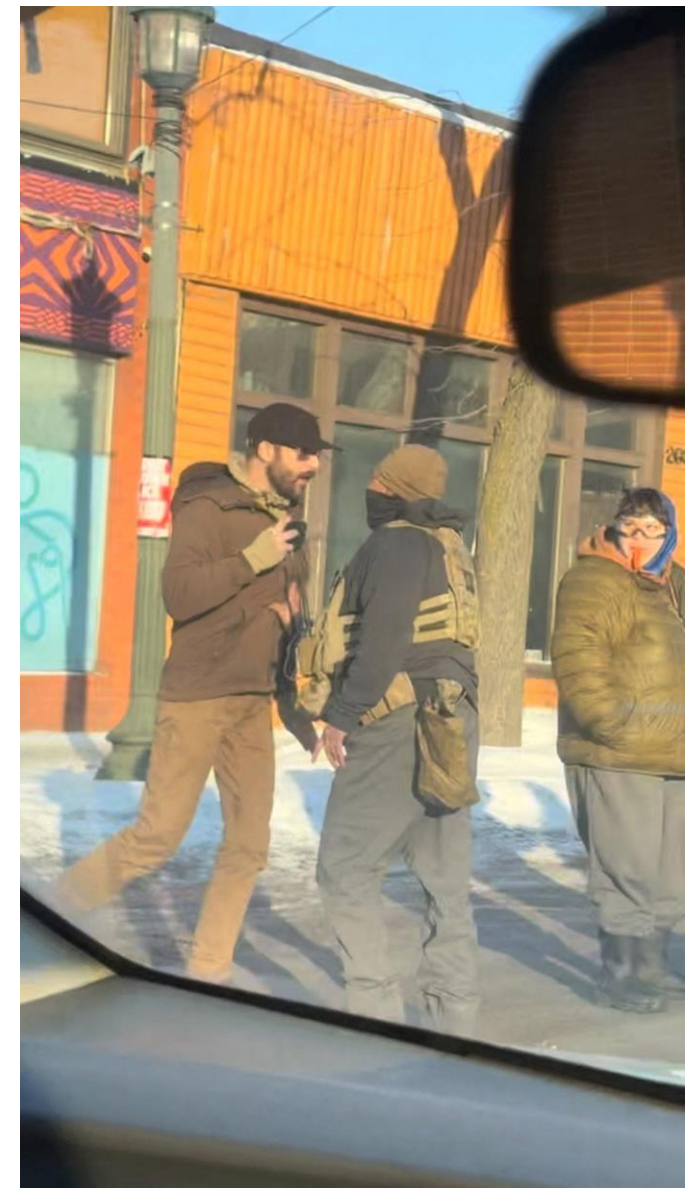


SCIENCE

- creationism
- climate change is fake
- vaccines cause autism
- Bill Gates faked the pandemic to implant you with microchips
- windmills cause cancer

POLITICS

- the 2020 US election was stolen
- Obama was born in Kenya
- Democrats and Hollywood are lizard people that are stealing hormones out of children
- Haitian immigrants are eating people's pets
- the FBI was behind January 6
- vandals caused the Reflecting Pool's algae
- the man you see holding a phone and helping a bystander was in fact brandishing a gun and out to shoot as many law enforcement officers as possible





In this world of AI, memes, and propaganda there are two different categories of danger:

1. Dangers of the outside world directly affecting your life:

(Getting sick because of the unvaccinated)



2. Getting caught up in an info-eco system that curtails anyone's ability to know the truth about what's going on:

(Elections and news become inherently unstable)



AND THE MORE MINOR
PROBLEM OF PEER REVIEW IN
VISUAL ART

THE BASIC PROCESS

Art—and in particular in the contemporary artworld where art can be anything—is judged on where it is exhibited.

For most artists, this means galleries.

The question is thus, which venues are “worthwhile” for peer review? How do we objectively rate what venues count as “worthwhile” and which are without value?

The hierarchy has mega galleries in certain geographic micro-locations like Chelsea at the top, and your local frame store at the bottom.



PROBLEMS WITH THE GALLERY SYSTEM

--galleries, and the art and artists, are affected by billionaires flipping collections and speculative art auctions

--even they know it:

“The whole art gallery art system became too big, too commercial, too impersonal and too corporate,” [Marc Glimcher, the chief executive \[of Pace Gallery\], said in an interview this week.](#) “We all know it’s true.”

--biennials are...not all good

--galleries only show to very small portion of the population

--The circular loop of reinforcement: are galleries prominent because they have good artists or are artists good because they have prominent galleries?

--what percentage of art in these galleries is worth your time? Most artists I know would say 10-25%



Emilie Louise Gossiaux's work at the Whitney Biennial

LOKI

AN ARTWORK ABOUT
PEER REVIEW

In an everyday sense, how do we reasonably evaluate artists?

--impact on yourself, influence on other artists

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ACADEMIC PEER REVIEW

--tenure is about rhetoric

--use tenure in a way that it means something

STRATEGY

--Become an expert in things, calling attention to the process of learning and growth

--Have the promotion process evaluate quality based on benchmarks outside the gallery system

--Choose other fields that are also forms of art, such as: paleontology, academic writing, geek culture/fandom, in particular cosplay, letter writing, comic battle debating, running a comic con, wiki-writing

--The goal: to interrogate peer review in Art in order to eventually reinforce the concept in an even stronger form

GEEK CULTURE

Fandom as an artwork



WRITING AND SHARING

Geek culture has a tradition of sharing and supporting each other through things like build threads, respect threads, and wikis

- Top 50 wiki writer on Comic Vine
- Daily Debater coordinator, writer for 75+ issues
- Front page articles
- Respect Threads are among the top search results for their characters
- Approved Eisner voter
- Talks/panels at comic cons and academic conferences including San Diego Comic Con, Ithacon, Comic Studies Society

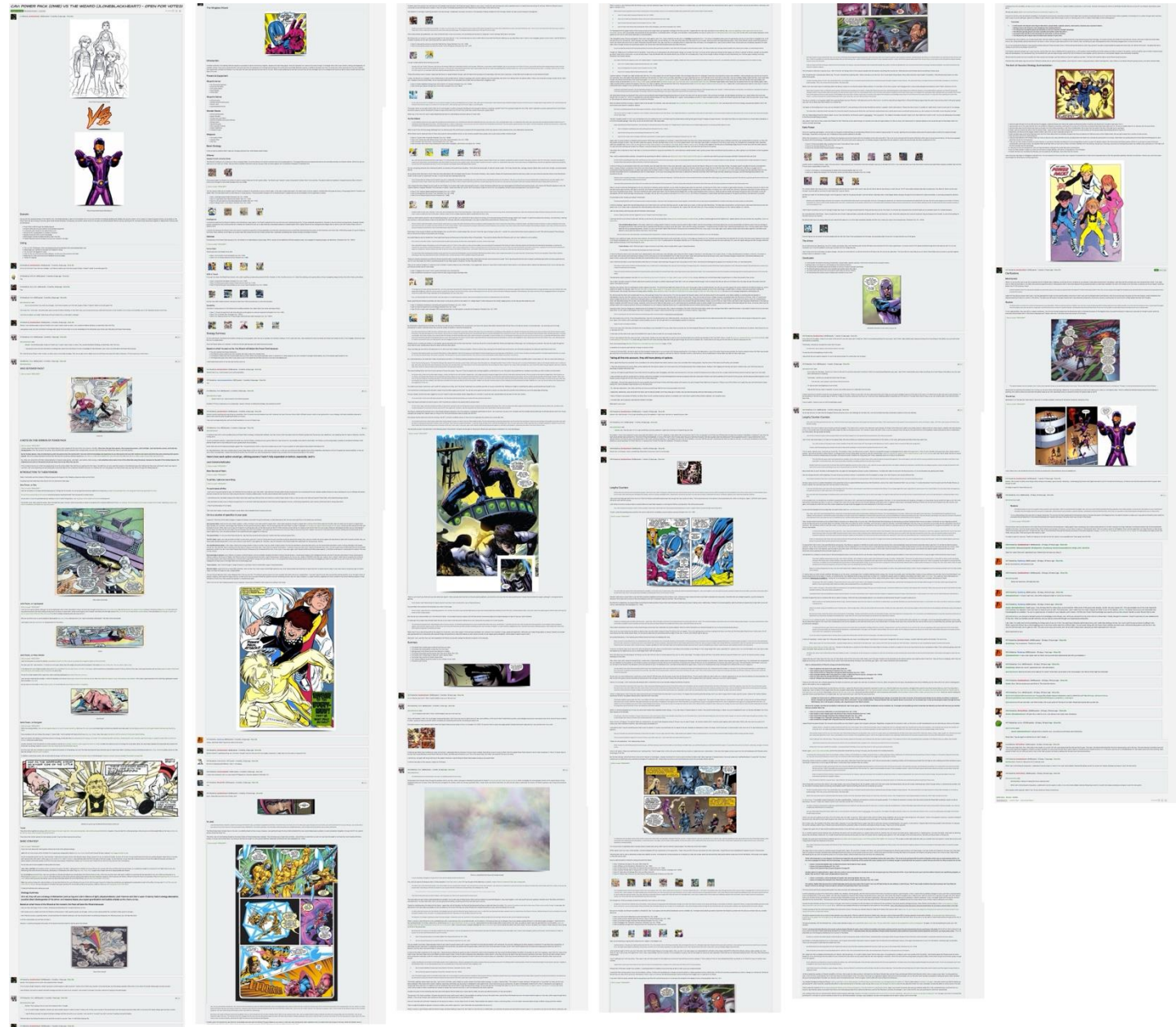
COSPLAY

- 501st Legion awards for Stormtrooper costume: Expert Infantryman, Centurion
- Responsible for approving other members' costumes in Garrison Excelsior
- Cosplay prizes, including the San Diego Comic Con Hallway Prize, awarded by the professional Costumer Designers Guild
- Featured on Marvel's 2019 Costoberfest event
- Listed on CBR's Best 10 Moon Knight Cosplays
- Backup dancer at multiple Weird Al Yankovic concerts
- Performer at 2025 Disney Upfront



COMIC BATTLE DEBATING

- Member of the Comic Vine Hall of Fame
- Currently running the Hall of Fame for new members
- Mod for the Battles area and now pragmatically the head Mod
- Top all-time winner of Battle of the Week feature (50+ wins)
- 2 million + page views as of 2 years ago
- Considered the winner in ~40% of matchups against other top debaters in “Who Is the Better Debater”
- Tourney winner and organizer



LETTER WRITER

--60+ letters across multiple publishers

--Had 2 letters in one issue, twice

--Known to Marvel Executive Editor Tom Brevoort

--Editors say they look forward to my letters even

if they're not about their books

--Brian K. Vaughan wrote a whole section in Saga

about losing my card

--won a vaunted Marvel No Prize

COMIC CON ORGANIZER

Geek/Art CONfluence

--7 years

- several hundred attendees per year

--built a reputation in the region for our creativity and

inclusiveness

--tens of thousands of dollars of grants

--nationally known speakers such as C. Spike Trotman, Jef

Trexler, MariNaomi, Noah Fischer, Tyler Boss, Valentine De

Landro, Ryan Dunlavey, Fred Van Lente, Nick Sousanis



COMPARISON OF STRATEGIES

Art and humor are particularly good at getting people's attention, being persuasive, and being contagious.

Are tricksters, ironically, among the most trustworthy characters? Who do we root for?

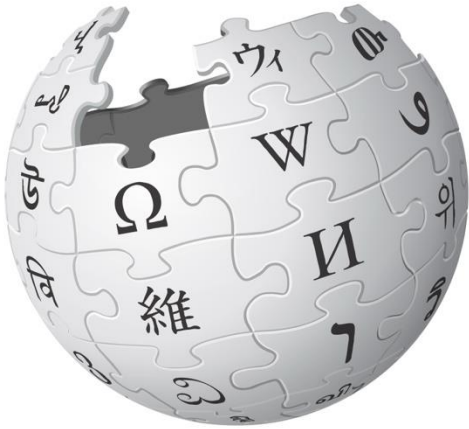
Trickster leaders like Odin show a potential path of being both the establishment and its subversion at the same time.

Humor, satire, and tricksterism are good for puncturing the self-serious blowhard nature of fascism.

However, they can also contribute to the “nothing is real” atmosphere of today's information environment, leading to an information-destabilization spiral.



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Positive qualities of the grassroot fandom platforms themselves:

- The feeling that you can join in—a high level of people succeeding regardless of initial socioeconomic or subcultural status
- Popular: mass attendance at comic cons, enormous success of wikis and fan fic
- High rates of involvement from women and queer people who make it theirs, and across geography
- High levels of quality
- Sharing and peer to peer support; reaching beyond an echo chamber
- Little or no financial incentives; the gift economy
- Support for proven expertise and the group working-out of facts

Wisdom of the masses; citizen peer review, citizen science

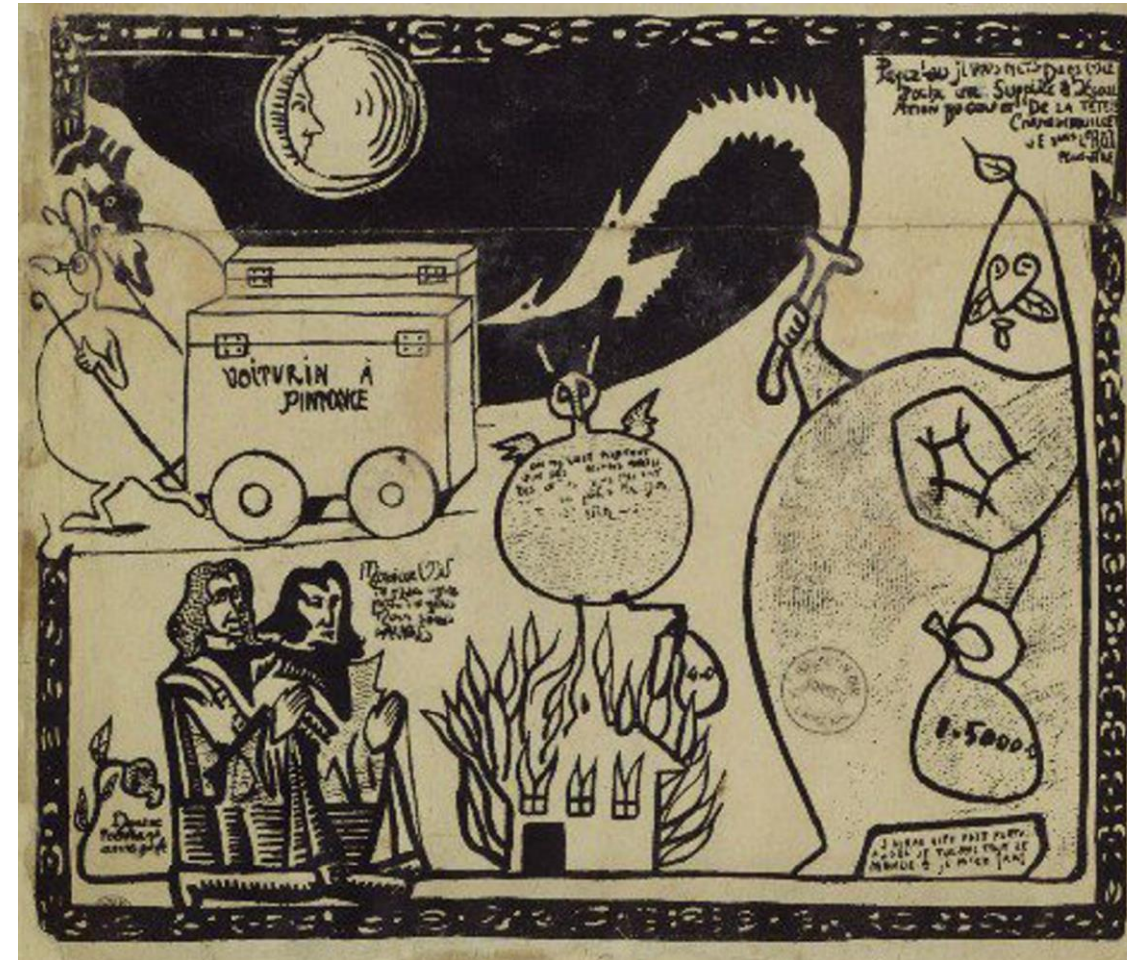
“Every time a self-published thing reaches as many people, or more people, than a journal published by a big university or some other fancy institution, an angel gets a new long-arm stapler.”—Marc Fischer, small press publisher

“Let’s hope the many free-thinking tricksters will use the tools of this medium, and invent a new symbolism that will keep the art popular, while avoiding populism.”

Anatomy of Comics: Famous Originals of Narrative Art, Damien MacDonald, 2022

“Pataphysics might help us find our way out of neoliberal educational models that have made some schools seem more like businesses.”

Pataphysics Unrolled, ed. Katie L. Pryce and Michael R. Taylor, 2022



Pere Ubu cover